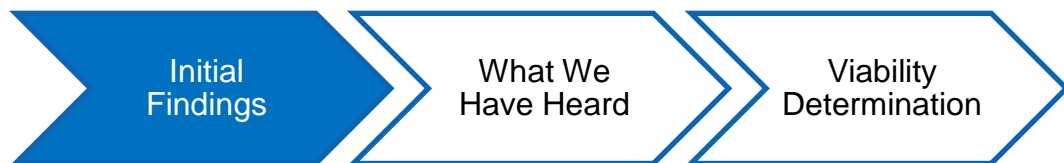


# Town of Swan Hills **Viability Review**

## Viability Determination and What We Have Heard Report

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**December 2014**



Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Team

**Viability Review Team**

**Town of Swan Hills Viability Review**

**Alberta Municipal Affairs**

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## Executive Summary

In May 2013, following a request from the council of the Town of Swan Hills that a dissolution study be undertaken for the town, the Minister of Municipal Affairs advised that a study would proceed in the form of a viability review led by a viability review team.

The Town of Swan Hills viability review began in August 2013 with the establishment of the Viability Review Team that led the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review. The team consisted of one elected and one administrative official each from the Town of Swan Hills and from the Municipal District of Big Lakes, and one representative each from the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators Association, the Local Government Administration Association and representation from Alberta Municipal Affairs.

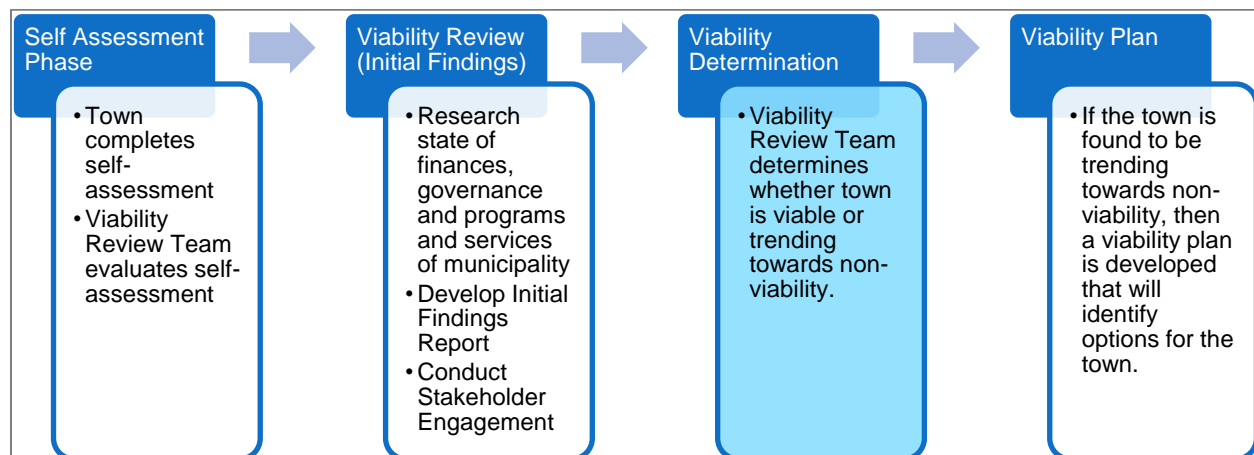
In April 2014, an Initial Findings Report, prepared by the Viability Review Team, was provided to the public. The report outlined the town's performance on key measures of sustainability and indicators of viability, as outlined in the Municipal Sustainability Strategy.

The viability review team was tasked with leading stakeholder engagement with residents, property owners, and other stakeholders. In addition to the stakeholder input form distributed to residents and property owners in June 2013, the Viability Review Team held an open house and a public meeting in the Town of Swan Hills on May 9, 2014, to gather additional information from stakeholders to assist with the team's determination of the viability of the Town of Swan Hills. The comments, gathered from stakeholders, are summarized in the What We Have Heard Report.

Following the stakeholder input sessions held in May, the viability review team met on two more occasions to discuss the viability of the town and make a viability determination.

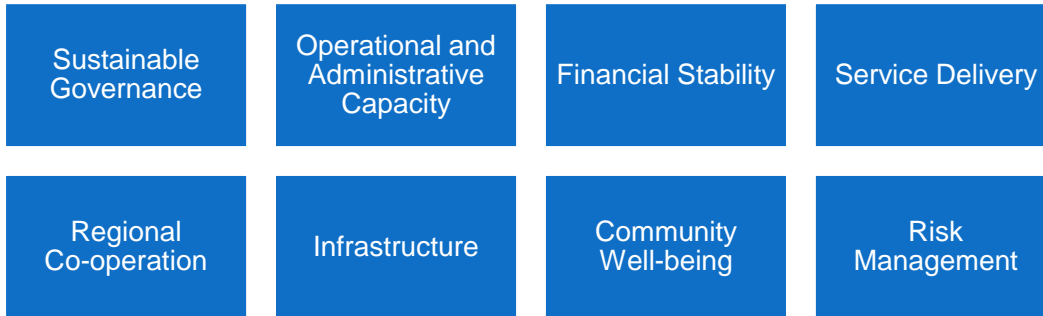
The Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Team has determined that the Town of Swan Hills is clearly viable. The Town of Swan Hills viability review is concluded. No further action is required.

In making its determination, the viability review team stated that it has confidence in the councils and administrations of the Town of Swan Hills and the Municipal District of Big Lakes to work together in addressing issues and additional recommendations to ensure the ongoing viability of the town are not required.



## Viability Determination

The Viability Determination provides the team's viability determination, the reasons for the decision, and the recommended actions to be taken for the ongoing viability of the Town of Swan Hills. The Viability Review Team examined the eight broad areas in which to assess the viability of a municipality, as outlined in the Municipal Sustainability Strategy. These areas are:



**Sustainable governance** addresses topics such as council practices and procedures, compliance with legislation, citizen engagement, and strategic planning.

**Operational and administrative capacity** addresses the capacity of the municipality to operate on a daily basis and support council decisions.

**Financial stability** addresses the municipality's capacity to generate and manage revenues sufficient to provide necessary infrastructure and services to the public.

**Service delivery** addresses the capacity of the municipality to provide essential services that meet residents' expectations and any appropriate standards.

**Regional co-operation** addresses the municipality's approach to collaborating with neighbours for the benefit of local and regional residents.

**Infrastructure** addresses the municipality's capacity to effectively and efficiently manage public infrastructure on behalf of residents.

**Community well-being** addresses local community characteristics that contribute to the vitality of the community and the long-term viability of the municipality.

**Risk management** addresses the capacity of the municipality to identify and manage key risks on behalf of residents.

## Viability Determination

The viability review process requires the viability review team to undertake a complete examination of the finances, administration, governance, and services of the review municipality. Stakeholder input forms part of the information gathering and research component of the review.

Following the review of information and stakeholder input, the viability review team makes a Viability Determination, which determines whether the municipality is clearly viable, or the municipality is trending towards non-viability.

If the viability review team determines that the review municipality is viable, the formal viability review is concluded. In a final report on the viability review to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the viability review team has an opportunity to recommend actions that the council of the review municipality may take to ensure or improve the ongoing viability of the municipality.

If the viability review team determines that the review municipality is trending towards non-viability, the viability review team recommends to the Minister of Municipal Affairs that the process continue with the development of a viability plan. The viability plan would examine steps to be taken for the municipality to become viable as well as the impact that municipal dissolution could have for residents of the review municipality as well as on the governance and administration of the receiving municipality.

In order to determine the viability of the Town of Swan Hill, the viability review team considered information from the following sources:

- Town of Swan Hills Initial Findings Report;
- Stakeholder Engagement; and
- the Viability Agreement between the Town of Swan Hills and the Municipal District of Big Lakes.

### **Town of Swan Hills Initial Findings Report**

Based on the direction set by the viability review team, information concerning the Town of Swan Hills finances, governance, infrastructure, and programs and services was collected from the town administration and from provincial records. The viability review team reviewed and analyzed the information and the results were incorporated in the Town of Swan Hills Initial Finding Report.

Based on the information reflected in the Initial Findings Report, the viability review team identified that:

- the town is viable short-term; however would require financial assistance long-term; and
- the capacity to fund infrastructure is the largest challenge the town faces and that without an identified funding source the town is trending towards non-viability.

The Town of Swan Hills Initial Findings Report was distributed to residents and property owners in April 2014.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

The Minister gave the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Team the mandate to lead public engagement of local residents, property owners, and other stakeholders in the affected municipalities.

In June 2013, residents and property owners of the Town of Swan Hills were informed of the initiation of the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review in a letter from the chair of the viability review team.

Attached to the letter, a stakeholder input form was distributed to gather information from stakeholders regarding the viability of the town. 85 submissions were received from the Swan Hills community.

On May 9, 2014, the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Team held an open house and a public meeting in the town to gather additional information from stakeholders to assist with the team's determination of the viability of the Town of Swan Hills. Written comments were gathered from participants in the Town of Swan Hills Stakeholder Engagement workbook that was also made available to stakeholders who did not attend events. About 50 people participated in the open house and public meeting.

The team was provided with a complete listing of the written comments provided by stakeholders on the stakeholder input form and stakeholder engagement workbook. The comments are summarized in the What We Have Heard Report that starts on page eight of this document.

At the open house and public meeting and from the written feedback from stakeholders, the team members learned that the majority of residents:

- had a strong sense of community;
- wanted to retain their autonomy and remain a town;
- had concerns with reduced representation on council if dissolution occurred;
- would like additional senior housing development in the town; and
- were concerned with the state of the town's infrastructure and lack of funding for the ten-year capital-spending plan.

### Viability Agreement

On September 8, 2014, the Municipal District of Big Lakes and the Town of Swan Hills signed a Viability Agreement. The Municipal District of Big Lakes agreed to provide conditional and unconditional grants to the Town of Swan Hills on an annual basis for 20 years as follows:

Years	Unconditional Grant	Conditional Infrastructure Grant	Total
2014	\$650,000 (Previously agreed to)	\$500,000	<b>\$1,150,000</b>
2015	\$650,000	\$950,000	<b>\$1,600,000</b>
2016 to 2034	\$950,000	\$1,000,000	<b>\$1,950,000</b>

The terms of the agreement include the following:

- the Town of Swan Hills has agreed to provide an annual report to the MD outlining how the conditional portion of the grants is spent;
- residents of the MD will have access to all urban municipal public facilities and services in the same manner and at the same cost as the residents of the town;
- the town has agreed not to pursue annexation or dissolution unless there is an agreement with the MD; and
- the agreement will be open for review on a five-year basis.

### Decision on the Viability of the Town of Swan Hills

At its September 8, 2014 meeting, the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Team determined that the Town of Swan Hills is clearly viable.

The viability review team is of the opinion that the Viability Agreement between the town and the Municipal District of Big Lakes will provide the town with the necessary funding for the town's proposed ten-year capital spending plan and will ensure the viability of the town.

The public input had a significant impact on the viability determination. The viability review team was influenced by the passion of the town residents for their community and to retain their independence and autonomy.

In addition, the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Team has confidence in the councils and administrations of the Town of Swan Hills and the Municipal District of Big Lakes to address other issues that have arisen during the viability review process. Both municipalities have demonstrated the capacity, ability, and willingness to address these issues. The town is clearly viable and no further recommendations are required to ensure the viability of the Town of Swan Hills.

## What We Have Heard – a summary of public input

The What We Have Heard section provides stakeholders of the Swan Hills community with an overview of the public input collected as part of the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review process.

Input was gathered through:

- the Stakeholder Input Form distributed to residents of the Town of Swan Hills on June 27, 2013;
- table discussions at the public meeting held on May 9, 2014; and
- the Stakeholder Engagement Workbook distributed at the stakeholder engagement events held in the Town of Swan Hills on May 9, 2014.

The viability team was provided with a verbatim listing of all written comments received throughout the viability review for its consideration when making a viability determination.

The What We Have Heard section contains a summary of the written submissions and is divided into two sections:

### **Part 1 – Input from stakeholder input forms**

A summary of the input gathered from the stakeholders in response to the Stakeholder Input Form mailed to town residents on June 27, 2013.

### **Part 2 – Input from the public meeting and written submissions**

A summary of the input received through the table discussions at the public meeting held on May 9, 2014, the completed Stakeholder Engagement Workbooks, and other written submissions.

Please note that comments are not recorded verbatim in the report:

- Comments of a similar nature have been summarized. The numbers in parentheses, at the end of comments, indicate the number of times the comment was submitted.
- Comments have been edited to improve clarity (e.g. spelling and grammar); and
- References to specific persons have been deleted to protect the anonymity or privacy of contributors and named individuals.

## Part 1 – Input from the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Stakeholder Input Forms

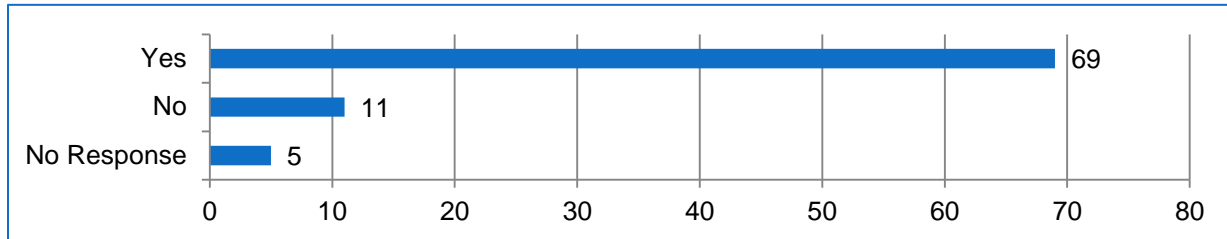
Residents and property owners of the Town of Swan Hills were mailed copies of the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Stakeholder Input Form (form) and asked to return completed forms to the Viability Review Team by July 26, 2013. A total of 666 forms were mailed out.



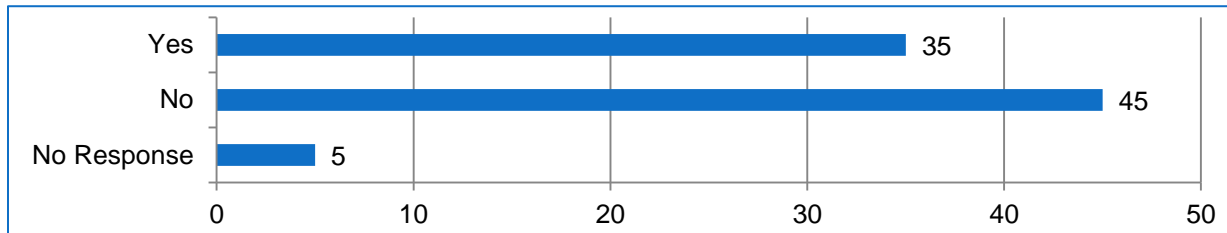
Additional forms were made available at the town office for those people who did not receive a form in the mail. The forms could be submitted by mail, fax, and email and completed online.

In total, 85 submissions were received by the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Team. The input provided on the completed stakeholder input forms is compiled in the following pages.

**Question 1 – Are you a resident of the Town of Swan Hills?**

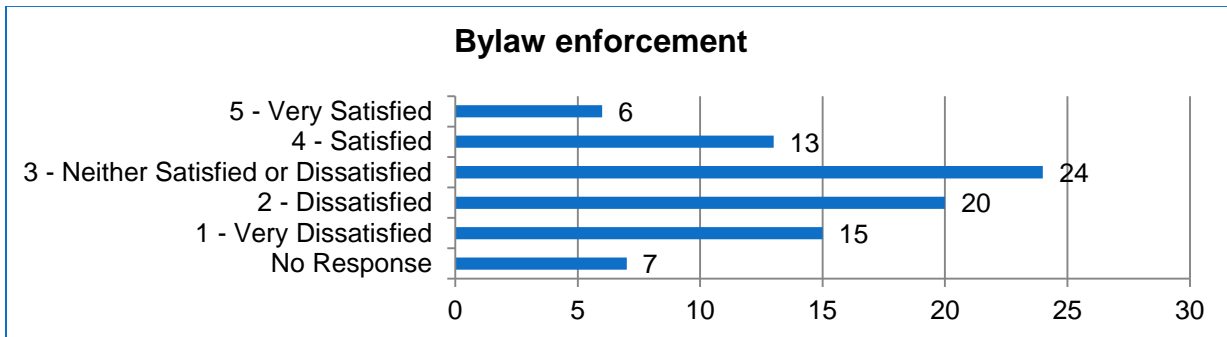


**Question 2 – Do you operate a business in the Town of Swan Hills?**



**Question 3 – What is your level of satisfaction with the following in the Town of Swan Hills?**

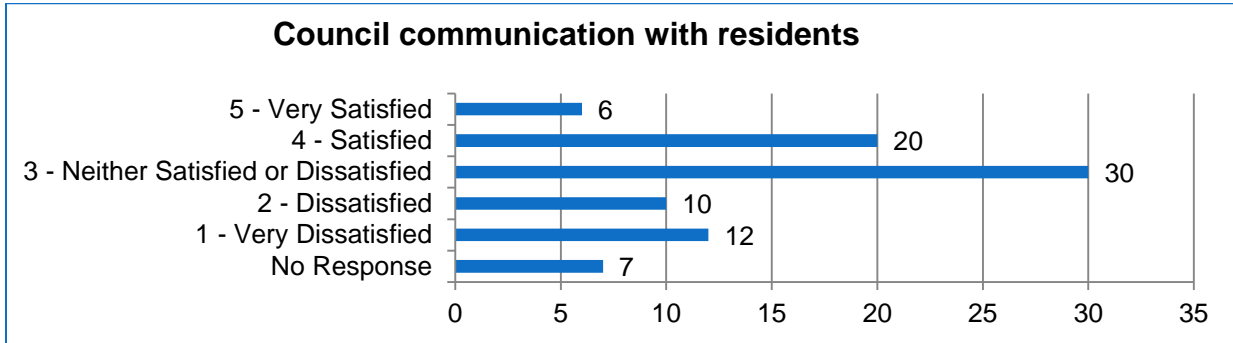
Stakeholders were asked to rate the 12 components of Question 3 from 1 to 5 with 1 representing very dissatisfied and 5 representing very satisfied.



**Written comments regarding bylaw enforcement:**

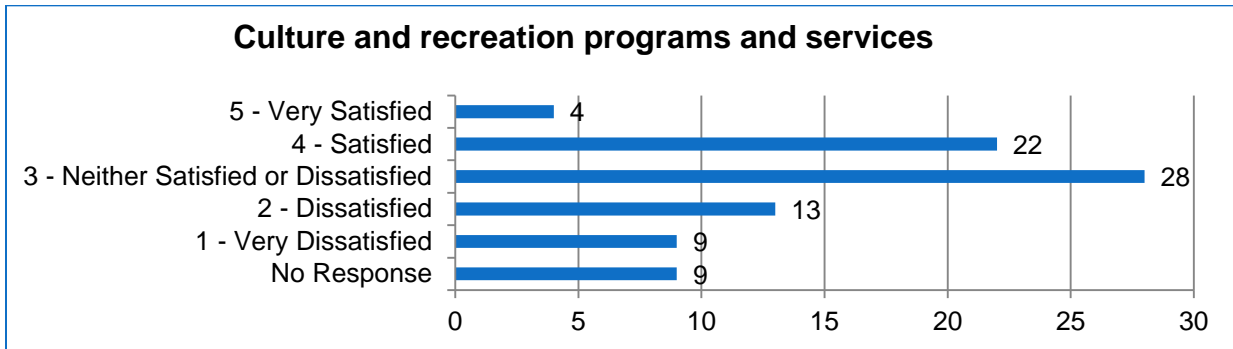
- complaints are not addressed
- don't need service
- high cost of services, equipment, and vehicle (3)
- lack of enforcement of bylaws
- parks and alleyways are full of weeds, town property should be cleaned up before private property is inspected

- part-time services would be adequate (2)
- services need to be accessible after regular office hours
- services need to be visible (2)
- should be laws that people clean-up their property



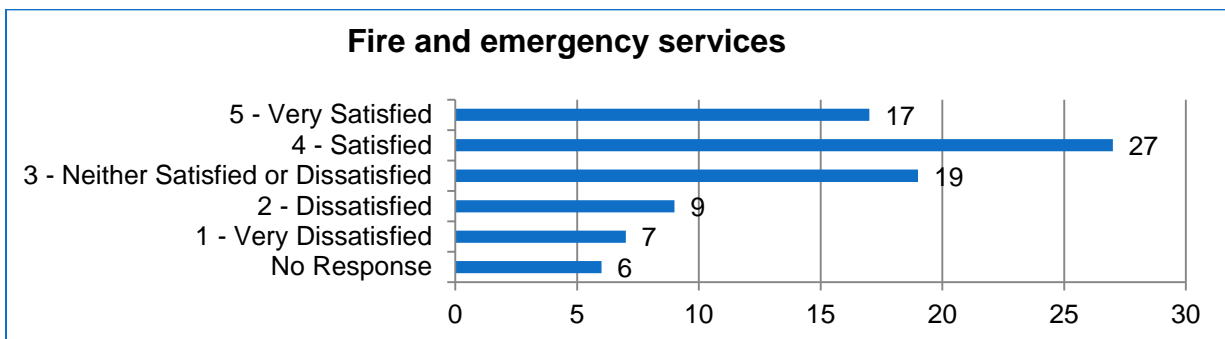
**Written comments regarding council communication with residents:**

- I have not attended a council meeting to understand the issues facing our community
- I want a town council that hears concerns and works with residents to address concerns
- it is important that residents are told the truth
- the public is not informed until issues arise then a forum is held to smooth things over



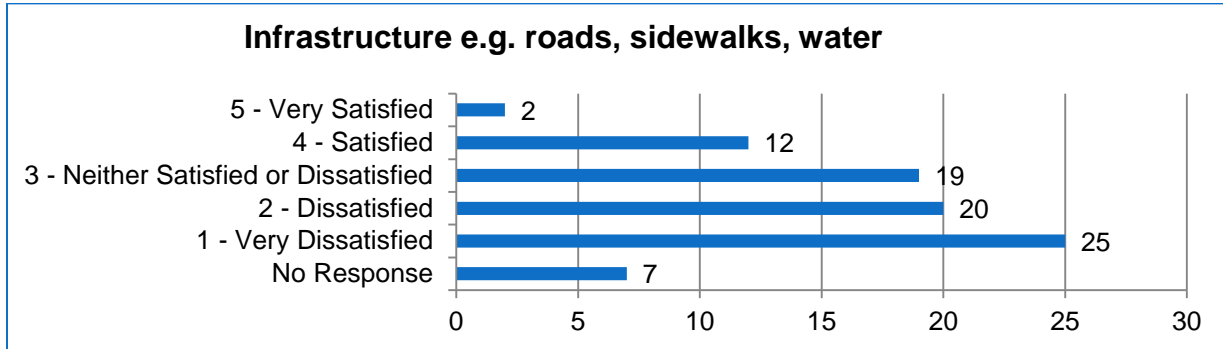
**Written comments regarding culture and recreation programs and services:**

- not much to do if not sports minded
- recreation facilities are the responsibility of clubs and volunteers to look after
- the town provides money to the clubs to try to look after the facilities



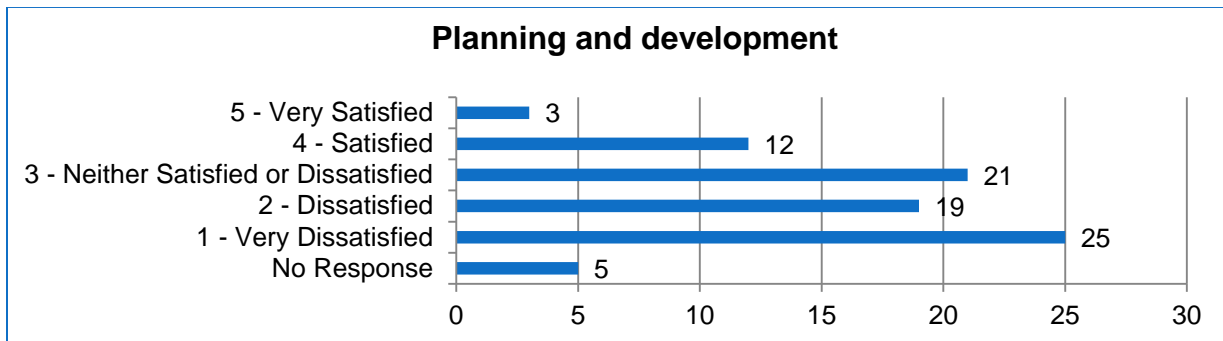
**Written comments regarding fire and emergency services:**

- the fire department’s ambulance is not used
- there are safety and environmental issues in the industrial area



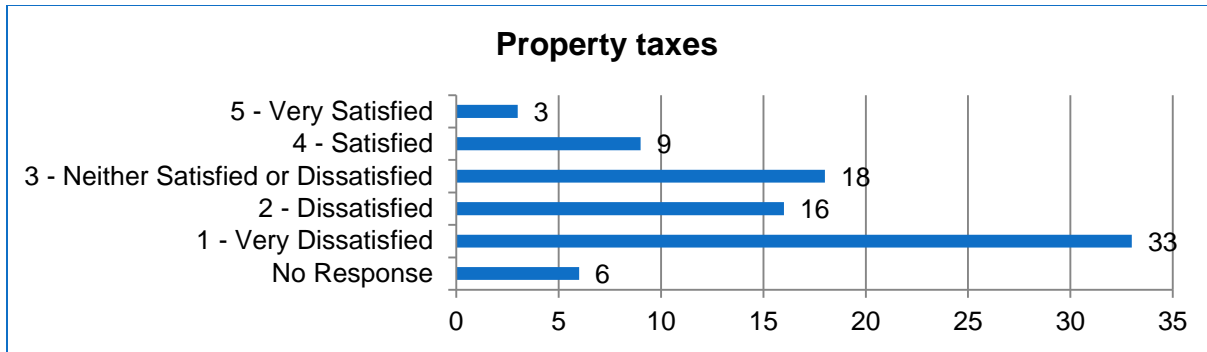
**Written comments regarding infrastructure:**

- infrastructure is old, dangerous, and needs replacing (3)
- major infrastructure repairs are needed to maintain residents needs and attract more people to the community
- without assistance, residents will see a huge jump in taxes to fund the repairs or the infrastructure will decay past the point of repair



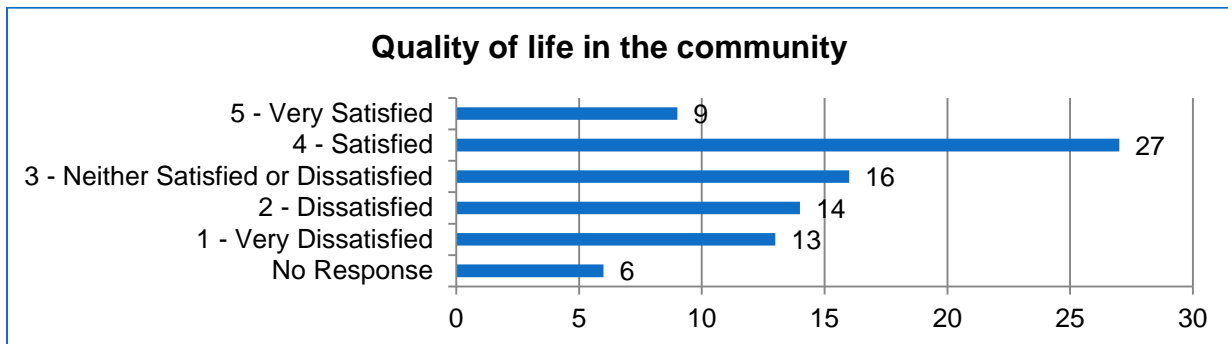
**Written comments regarding planning and development:**

- annex a 20 km radius around the town to bring the industry within town boundaries
- lack of industrial property and residential lots for growth
- need for more planning and growth for the younger generation in the community
- need for small acreage development
- the community needs to promote development and change (2)
- the high number of vacant properties may be a sign of a failing town
- the surrounding crown land limits the towns ability to expand to accommodate growth
- town needs to develop ways to attract people and businesses to Swan Hills (2)
- we face issues and challenges with growth of the community
- with the dwindling population, the town is faced with an impossible task



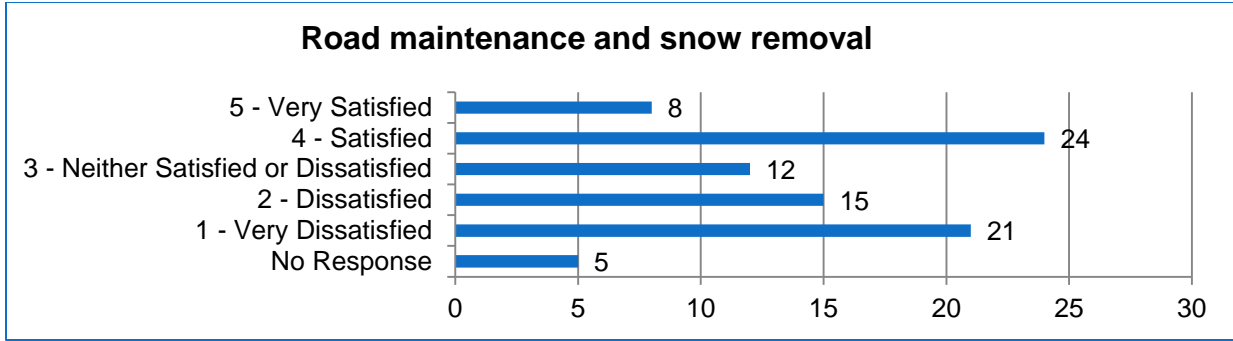
**Written comments regarding property taxes**

- business taxes are too high
- high taxes put a strain on residents
- lack of industrial tax base in town and from the surrounding area is an issue (10)
- not justifiable that the town tax rate is double the MD rate
- on similar properties, property taxes are higher in Swan Hills than in neighbouring towns (2)
- people have either relocated or are considering relocation due to the higher taxes (4)
- taxes are high considering the lack of amenities
- the limited tax base places the burden on the private homeowner (2)
- the steady decline in population and businesses is due in part to the location but also the tax base of only 2000 people



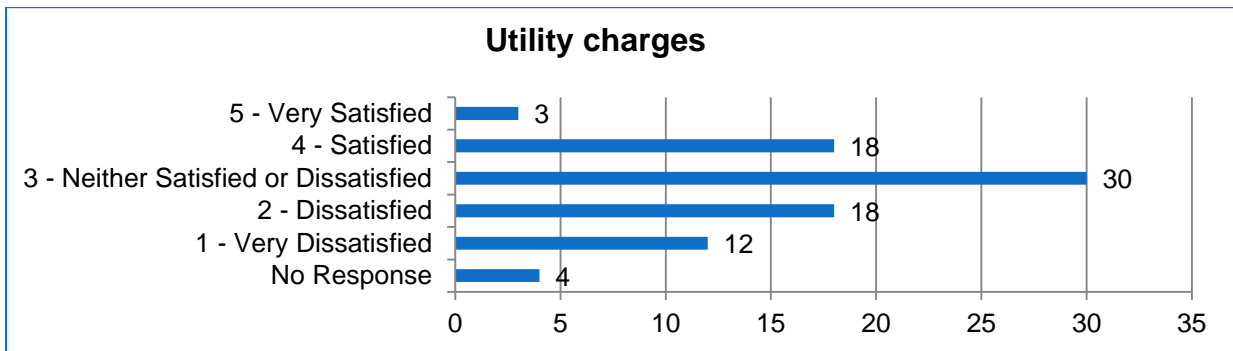
**Written comments regarding quality of life in the community:**

- bussing to high school in neighbouring community should be an option/available (2)
- it (Swan Hills) is a great place to live and enjoy Alberta
- relocated to a neighbouring community because of the high school courses offered there as there was no longer bussing available from Swan Hills
- Swan Hills is a remote location and residents should be eligible for the Northern Living Allowance to compensate for high prices (2)
- the entrance to the town needs to be welcoming
- the results of this review might affect vacancy rates and property values
- the town needs to be made attractive to live in (4)
- there is a lack (decrease in) of medical and dental services in the town (5)
- town businesses do not want competition and prices are high (2)



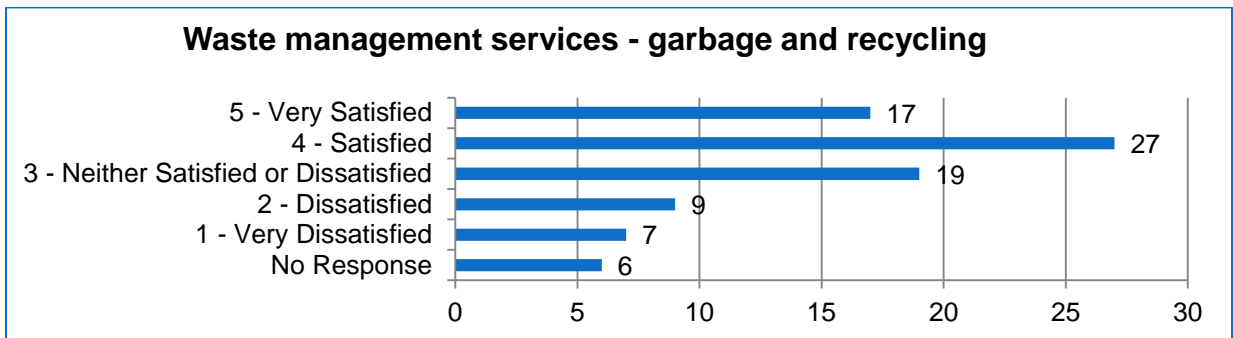
**Written comments regarding road maintenance:**

- need better road conditions
- need better snow removal (2)
- neglected maintenance caused the need for major repairs
- road conditions are poor and need to be fixed correctly when damaged (2)
- snow removal must be expensive in the winter months
- accidents have occurred in the winter due to the height of the snow banks



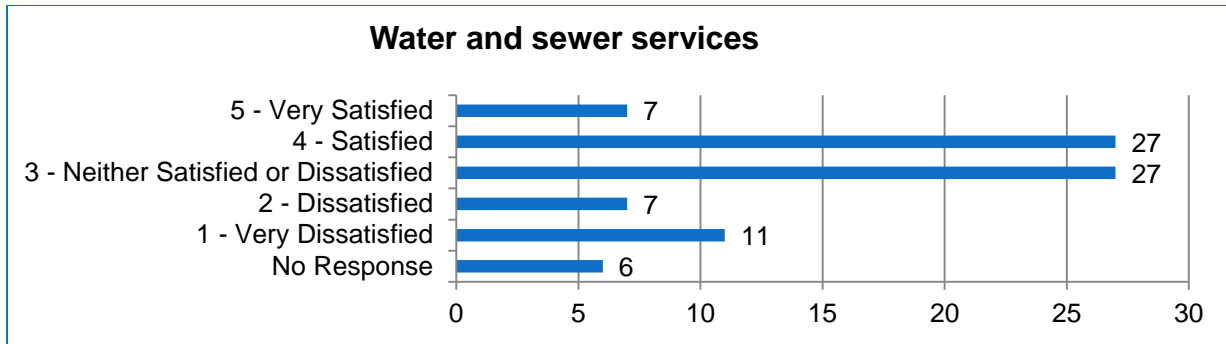
**Written comments regarding utility charges:**

- charges were not high enough for oilfield waste to cover cost of landfill operation ... resulting in landfill closure



**Written comments regarding waste management services:**

- mismanagement of the landfill site forced the need to turn it into a transfer station

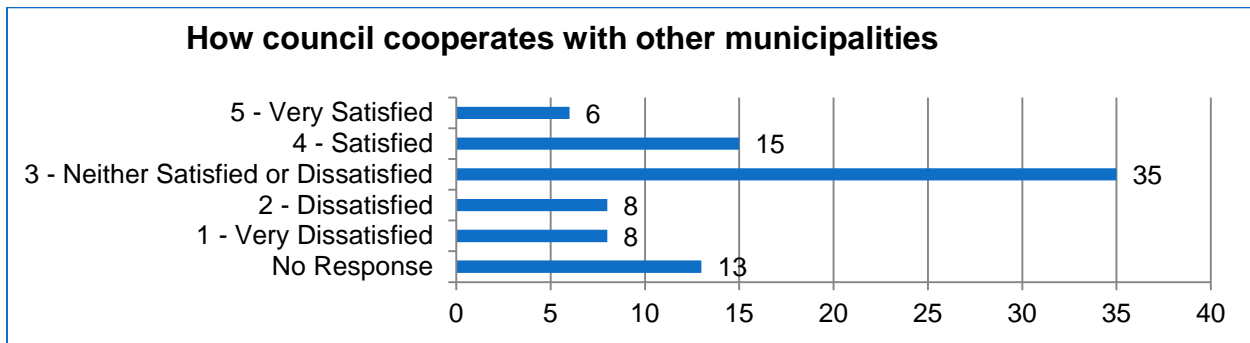


**Written comments regarding water and sewer services:**

- a number of properties have required sewer repairs at the owners expense

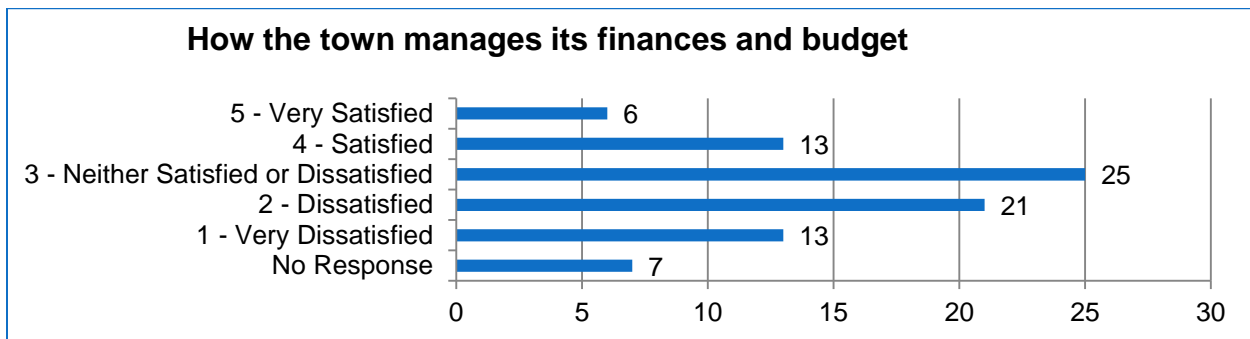
**Question 4 – What is your level of satisfaction with the following in the Town of Swan Hills?**

Stakeholders were asked to rate the five components of Question 4 from 1 to 5 with 1 representing very dissatisfied and 5 representing very satisfied.



**Written comments regarding how council cooperates with other municipalities:**

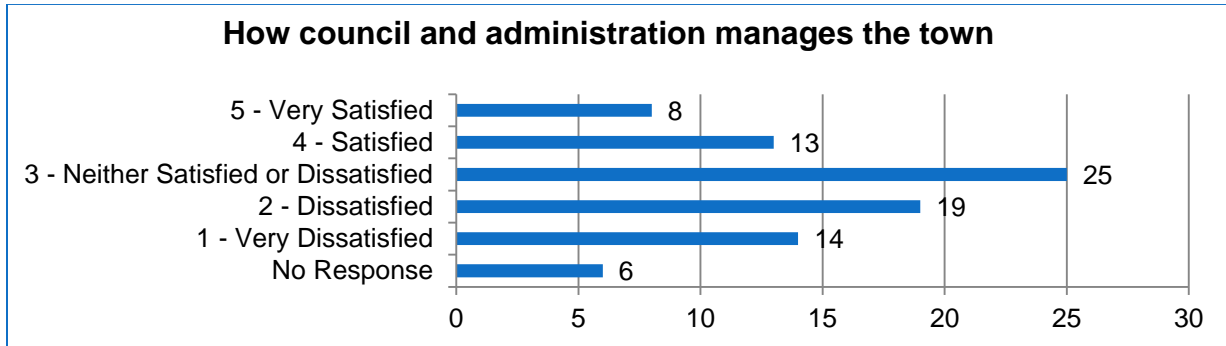
- the MD has cost shared with the town for the past 20 years



**Written comments regarding how town manages its finances and budget:**

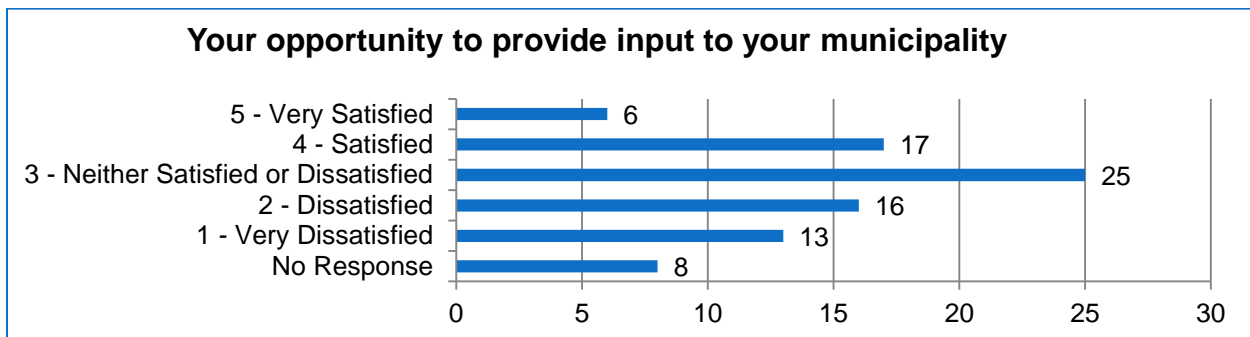
- councillors received an increase in wages of 100%

- the town claims it did not receive all its MSI funding
- in 2012, council budget is \$174,000 and they do nothing
- too many purchases of equipment and vehicles in the past three years (2)
- too many perks for staff
- town needs to budget better
- money is provided to the clubs to look after the facilities, volunteerism is low, maybe town staff could cut the grass at the ball diamonds
- staff training, paid for by the town, is an advancement for that person, they get hired, take courses, then move out of town



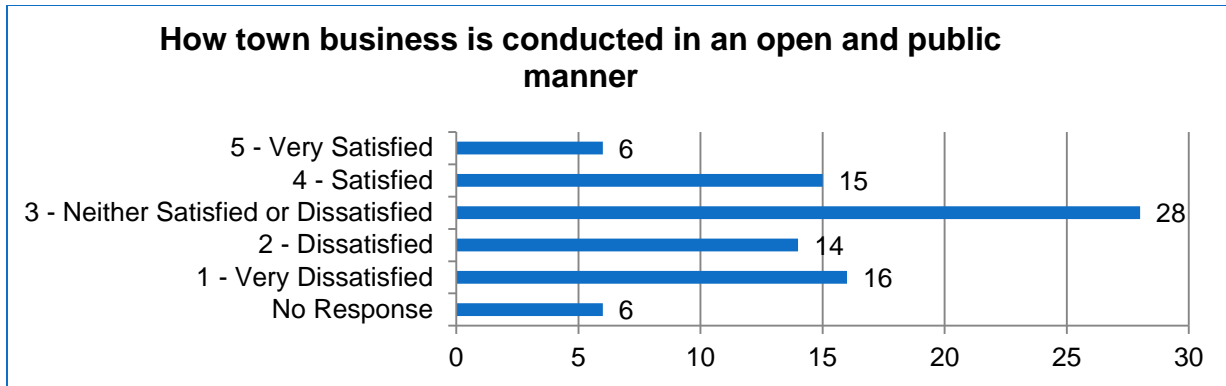
**Written comments regarding how council and administration manages the town:**

- administration and staff are doing a fabulous job (3)
- attendance at meetings, good communication, and knowledgeable people is important
- do not see what council does
- the council does not do its job
- the present town council is doing an amazing job
- the town is left with serious money and infrastructure problems from past councils (2)
- the town itself is always a buzz with town involvement and I don't see great overspending of tax payer money, which tells me, I hope, that council is doing a great job
- town council and management is the best we have had in years (2)
- with dwindling population, the town is faced with an impossible task



**Written comments regarding residents' opportunity to provide input to the municipality:**

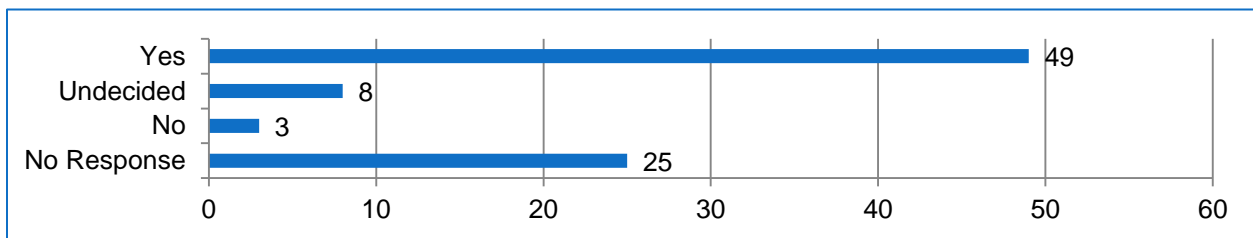
- ideas are put down and council decides



**Written comments regarding how town business is conducted in an open and public manner:**

- proper communication and honesty is important (2)

**Question 5 – Do you support that Alberta Municipal Affairs should conduct a viability review for the Town of Swan Hills at this time?**



**Written comments regarding whether Alberta Municipal Affairs should be conducting a viability review for the Town of Swan Hills:**

- dissolution would be a large benefit to the Town of Swan Hills and would hopefully mean greater access to the large tax base that exists in the MD of Big Lakes
- some believe Swan Hills would lose facilities; however, Fort Assiniboine gained when it dissolved (Woodlands County) (2)

**Question 6 – Do you wish to provide any additional comments about the Town of Swan Hills to the viability review team?**

Of the 85 respondents, 41 chose to provide written comments or questions.

Comments have been listed under the respective question about the town operation or practice. Those comments not pertaining to one of the questions are listed below.

**Written comments not directly related to the questions on the input form:**

- Unless the provincial government steps in and requires municipal districts (MD) to give funds to the communities where the majority of people in the area live, communities will have no choice but to become hamlets and force the MDs to be responsible for the expenses incurred in running those communities (2)



- If the Municipal District of Big Lakes transferred funds (\$3 million/more than \$400,000) annually to the Town of Swan Hills, the town could deal with the aging infrastructure and continue to provide services to both its residents and the surrounding oilfield (3)

## Part 2 – Written Input from Table Discussions at the Public Meeting and Stakeholder Engagement Workbooks

The Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Team held two stakeholder engagement events on May 9, 2014, a drop-in open house and a public meeting. Approximately 50 members of the Swan Hills community attended the two events at which the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Stakeholder Engagement Workbook was distributed.

At the public meeting, the participants were grouped around eight tables and guided through the five questions in the Town of Swan Hills Viability Review Stakeholder Engagement Workbook.

A summary of the responses to the five questions along with comments provided in other written submissions is provided in this part of the report. Comments are listed under the respective question.

### Question 1 – What is important to you about the governance of the town and political representation at the local level?

Matters identified by the table groups as most important were:

- at a five-hour meeting, Swan Hills would only get 20 minutes to half an hour every two weeks
- concern that in joining the MD would see Swan Hills compete with 8 or 9 other communities
- council representation with an equal voice
- councillors more responsive as a town
- current restructuring of local council
- currently have seven representatives, concerned with going down to two would not have the interest of the citizens represented.
- ensuring the local representation has the best interest of the Town of Swan Hills for long term and not only for their term on council
- fair local representation on the MD council if hamlet status
- less council members means less representation for Swan Hills on the regional and provincial level
- local representation
- Swan Hills has a large enough population to have a council focused solely on Swan Hills issues
- viability – reduce number of councillors to five from seven
- we need assurance that we have an adequate number of councillors if we become a hamlet

Summary of responses provided in stakeholder engagement workbooks and other written submissions:

- council is doing a great/good/adequate job (6)
- councillors are overpaid
- elected representatives be open and responsive (3)
- ensure representatives have the best interest of Swan Hills for the long term and not only for the term on council
- if dissolution occurs, would like fair local representation of at least two councillors on the MD council (13)

- it is important to have local representatives that know the community and act on the residents' behalf (11)
- municipal governance should be dedicated to running maintaining the town recreational infrastructure etc. in the most cost efficient manner
- reduce the number of councillors (7)
- Swan Hills should continue as a town and not dissolve (15)
- there is control of what is being done on a local basis (2)
- two council meetings a month
- we want a 7-member council and mayor elected by the people for the people (13)

## **Question 2 – What is important to you about the types of municipal services and the costs to the consumer (including utility rates)?**

Matters identified by the table groups as most important:

- capital infrastructure repairs and future replacement
- continuing support of the arena, library, school etc.
- cost of utilities
- important to keep present services
- keep all services offered and maintained
- lost services that are not provided by the town, for example the bottle depot, that affect residents
- policing, seniors housing, recreational facilities, and tourism development
- recreational facilities that we have remain maintained with consideration of expense to the taxpayers
- safety in the town
- services are good but in need of repair
- the taxes we pay and the utility bills are comparable with other communities and we would not want to see these costs to the taxpayer skyrocket This would not make Swan Hills attractive to new residents that we would love to make Swan Hills their home
- the town's services (streets, roads, water, and sewer) are in poor repair and are expensive for citizens. This all falls on the serious Infrastructure issues and the lack of town funds to repair and fund these services
- the town is providing good services
- we would like to have our pool, curling rink, arena, library, and other facilities maintained and to see improvements to things like the cemetery and recreation trails
- with consideration to our town's location, importance of clean drinking water, sewer, streets, hospital, ambulance, fire department need to be maintained
- would like the costs to be affordable for residents

Summary of responses provided in stakeholder engagement workbooks and other written submissions:

- all the services provided are important
- increased rates may be a hardship
- it is important to retain recreational facilities (8)
- keep infrastructure in good repair
- reduce tax and utility rates
- retain all our services and maintain the level of service (20)
- services other than utilities should be self-sustaining
- services that could improve:

- greater water pressure
- recycling program (6)
- snow removal (8)
- street cleaning and dust control
- town beautification (3)
- transfer station open more often
- utility rates should be comparable with the rates in other Alberta municipalities (3)
- utility rates should be user pay and based on full cost-recovery (8)
- water, sewer, and garbage rates are reasonable (9)
- would not really want to see much change in the level of services, or the rates charged, unless there are drastic problems that need to be addressed.
- would like costs to be affordable for all residents

### **Question 3 – What is important to you about the quality of life in Swan Hills?**

Matters identified by the table groups as most important:

- access to basic necessities
- activities for young families and kids
- clean crisp air and beautiful views
- closeness of the community – everyone knows everyone
- closeness to the outdoors
- comfortable community
- crime rate is minimal
- full education without leaving town
- gateway to the wilderness – quading, sledding, fishing, hunting, berry picking, camping
- great services, recreational opportunities due to the crown land surrounding the town as well as tourism opportunities
- healthcare, school access, and contact with nature
- like the small town atmosphere and the security that comes with it
- lots of work and lots to offer residents
- medical services - the doctor, pharmacy, and hospital
- need seniors' facility – both to keep older residents in town and for others to bring their parents to
- raising children in a safe environment
- recreational vehicle access
- safe quiet close knit community that is senior safe
- safe quiet nature
- safety for young families and seniors
- senior housing and maybe a bus, activities, and meals on wheels
- social and recreational gathering place for all ages
- strong community support and friendly people
- the community looks after each other
- we are happy with our quality of life

Summary of responses provided in stakeholder engagement workbooks and other written submissions:

- affordability – reasonable taxes and cost of living
- availability of health services in Swan Hills (14)

- K-12 School in Swan Hills
- natural beauty and outdoor recreational opportunities (15)
- need a volunteer group for out of town trips and for remote car racing
- quality of life is very satisfactory (22)
- recreation facilities and programs are important and need to be kept (4)
- safe community (19)
- senior programs and a housing facility to allow residents to stay in Swan Hills (33)
- sports and leisure activities for younger people similar to those in other communities (3)
- strong sense of community and a small town feeling (12)
- town beautification (4)
- town services (3)

#### **Question 4 – What is important to you about the amount of property taxes levied by the town for municipal purposes?**

Matters identified by the table groups as most important:

- assessments are too high
- we need a larger tax base in order to meet the upcoming capital funding requirements to repair and rebuild our infrastructure
- if taxes are increased, make sure that the money is used toward services
- need a larger tax base
- no problem with services offered
- not enough opportunities to capture new development as not inventory of ready to use land
- older population is on fixed incomes so an extra \$1,000 would be nice off the taxes
- our problem is how to fund the infrastructure without raising taxes
- residents cannot afford higher taxes nor can we attract more people with the high taxes we pay
- tax dollars must be used responsibly
- taxes are fair at this time and need to be affordable for everyone
- taxes should be comparable to other towns and maintained at present level and are okay as long as managed well
- the current mill rate is at the higher end and we would not want to see it higher
- the lagging behind in taxes is not a good way to raise money in a town
- what can be done for infrastructure debt that cannot be carried on residential tax load? – another improved agreement for revenue sharing with the MD of Big Lakes

Summary of responses provided in stakeholder engagement workbooks and other written submissions:

- challenge anyone to take and add last 10 years taxes and then divide by 10 – you would be surprised
- I am willing to pay more taxes to keep what we have. We are a young town so to me we do not have a nest egg established.
- increase the tax base to provide more income (23)
- it is important to have the taxes collected cover the costs to put in new, maintain basic infrastructure like roads, water sewer
- lower taxes would attract people and industry (8)
- no problem as long as services continue or no problem with an increase as long as services improve

- our problem is how do we fund infrastructure without raising taxes
- property taxes should be affordable for seniors on fixed incomes (5)
- property taxes should be comparable to those in other communities (3)
- property taxes should remain the same (7)
- tax dollars need to be spent responsibly, effectively and openly (19)
- property taxes are at the high end - would not want them to increase (3)
- town portion is reasonable - keep the property taxes reasonable
- we have been told that comparatively, taxes here are higher than in surrounding communities, so an increase would be hard to take without a very good explanation.

### **Question 5 – What is important to you about other viability issues that the team should consider?**

Matters identified by the table groups as most important:

- access to developable land (this is a prov. Issue)
- asking for more won't solve any problems now or in the foreseeable future
- attracting outdoor related tourism such as hiking, quadding, snowmobiling and fishing
- availability of land for development
- better utilization of our hospital – using a portion as an extended care facility
- business builds business and families build communities
- cemetery road, airport road are usually in rough shape
- come up with a realistic plan to attract businesses
- costs of infrastructure repairs
- environmental issues – contamination
- how to draw more residents & business – increase the tax base
- if we can't attract new people, people are going to leave
- joint committees to develop tourism
- no land for any potential new residents/businesses
- no other viability issues – the town does not need to be solved it needs a boost
- open up more land for residential and commercial development
- options to increase town tax base
- public works
- revenue sharing plan with the MD, with the last negotiations with the MD, the oil companies in the area supported higher revenue sharing from the MD royalties for oil revenue
- seniors housing, keep our elders in the community (2)
- Swan Hills was built for the oil industry, receives no linear taxes, yet Swan Hills taxpayers subsidize the recreation, infrastructure, and housing of that industry
- there are more economic opportunities than oil but Swan Hills does not tap into those opportunities such as tourism and forestry
- we need to keep what we have

Summary of responses provided in stakeholder engagement workbooks and other written submissions:

- Attracting and bringing in more services to our community replacing the lost services such as the bottle depot (7)
- improving communication with residents (3)
- increasing the population of Swan Hills (2)

- lack of funds to maintain infrastructure (4)
- long term planning
- obtaining support from the MD (7)

Those comments not pertaining to one of the questions are listed below.

### **Additional Comments**

Written comments not directly related to the questions in the stakeholder engagement workbook:

- amount of staff to be retained at town office if we go under MD – hamlet status; paper work will probably go direct to the MD office in High Prairie and increase “their” staff causing unemployed people in Swan Hills (limited jobs available in Swan Hills) “we” need jobs in Swan Hills!
- will need to look at long-term maintenance structure of MD to see where Swan Hills will fit in.
- concerns that minds are not already made up as to which way this process is going to go and that powers to be do not have more influence than others
- lack of communication concerning this issue (3)
- no guarantee that the MD will pay for the cost of infrastructure repairs should we be a hamlet (2)
- poor communication during process so far, a short time line for turn in of opinion from residents, want better and more frequent communication, short notice of meeting scheduled on a Friday (3)
- what we thought about tonight? this was a great event – heard lots of opinions, I think this will cause a lot more discussion in this community, I liked it.